Cutting corners at work: An individual differences perspective

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ABSTRACT

Across two studies, we investigated individual differences in the tendency to cut corners at work, and assessed whether a range of personality traits predict this behavior. In two independent samples of Australians ($N = 533$) and Americans ($N = 589$), we examined individual differences in cutting corners at work and tested sex differences and the surrounding nomological network of cutting corners. Collectively, we found that men were more likely than women were to cut corners at work, which was fully a function of individual differences in psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and conscientious. Various personality traits accounted for individual differences in the tendency to cut corners at work, indicating that individuals with this tendency may be morally compromised, selfish, impulsive, and not forward-thinking. Results were generally unaffected by contextual factors, such as the hypothetical risks and rewards associated with cutting corners. In our discussion, we focus on the deleterious consequences of cutting corners and the importance of selection and Human Resource practices that address the potential fallout from having such people in the workplace.

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"Corner-cutting" is a behavior characterized by skipping one or multiple steps considered important to a task, for the purpose of completing the task sooner by taking shortcuts (Beck, Scholer, & Schmidt, 2016) and bending the rules (Hannah & Rovertson, 2015; Sekerka & Zolin, 2007). It most commonly occurs in jobs that are highly demanding with few resources at ones disposal (Sekerka & Zolin, 2007) and where the organizational culture prioritizes efficiency regardless of potential risks (Beck et al., 2016; Parks, Ma, & Gallagher, 2010). Cutting corners is generally considered an undesirable aspect of employee behavior. Corner-cutting is associated with low job performance (Sackett, 2002), safety code violations and injuries (Christian, Bradley, Wallace, & Burke, 2009), and days absent from work caused by related injuries (Halbesleben, 2010). However cutting corners is not inherently negative and in some situations can potentially be adaptive (Beck et al., 2016). Indeed, the related concept of "workarounds" provides a context-specific conceptualization of cutting corners as "clever methods for getting done what the system does not let you do easily" (Ash et al., 2003; p. 195). Clearly, in the context of dysfunctional systems whereby administrative processes block the achievement of work-related goals, it follows that corner-cutting will sometimes be adaptive.

To date, research on cutting corners has focused primarily on situational predictors (e.g., Beck et al., 2016; Halbesleben, 2010). However, like other forms of salient behavior in the workplace (e.g., organizational citizenship behaviors, social influence, bullying), it is likely that cutting corners is also the result of differences between people, such as sex differences and individual differences in personality. In two independent studies, therefore, we seek to better understand tendencies towards cutting corners by (1) developing a short self-report measure of corner-cutting at work, (2) testing for sex differences in cutting corners, (3) examining the nomological network surrounding this tendency with standard, broad-band personality traits, (4) testing whether sex differences in self-reported corner-cutting are a function (i.e., mediated by) personality traits, (5) test the stability of personality traits as predictors of corner-cutting behavior across contexts characterized by different consequences for this behavior (i.e. reward or punishment) hypothetical reward or punishment in the workplace, and (6) test whether work outcomes (i.e., income) of corner-cutting behavior are dependent on the personality traits of people who cut corners.

1. Individual differences in cutting corners

In this paper, we study the trait basis of cutting corners using three broadband sets of personality and one narrowband individual difference. Broadband traits are considered general in nature, distal in their predictive ability to understand individual differences in attitudes and behaviors, and describe people's dispositional biases towards the world. For broadband traits, we adopt the Big Five model (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness/intellect), its extension to include individual differences in honesty and humility in the HEXACO model, and capture darker aspects of personality in the Dark Triad traits (e.g., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism; Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). There is considerable

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literature demonstrating the importance of broadband traits in predicting a range of important outcomes including eating habits (Goldberg & Strycker, 2002), health beliefs (O'Connor, Martin, Weeks, & Ong, 2014), leadership (Judge & Bono, 2001; O'Connor & Jackson, 2010), job performance (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000), job satisfaction (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002), and interests (Jonason, Wee, Li, & Jackson, 2014c).

Based on this literature, a number of traits stand out as instrumental in predicting workplace outcomes. First, individuals who are conscientious tend to perform better at work and engage in less counterproductive workplace behavior (Bowling, 2010). Conscientiousness describes "individuals who have characteristic tendencies to be dependable, careful, thorough, and hardworking" and consequently should be better performers on the job (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; p. 870). We therefore suggest conscientious employees are likely to diligently complete their work, even when certain tasks seem tedious or unnecessary. We expect that individuals high in conscientiousness will generally be less likely to cut-corners in the workplace (H1a) and that their unwillingness to cut-corners will exist regardless of contextual factors (H1b).

In addition, neuroticism/emotional instability may prove important. Emotionally unstable and neurotic people tend to be less satisfied at work and perform poorly overall (Judge & Bono, 2001). Neuroticism is a trait that predisposes people to be vigilant to threats in one's environment and sensitive to punishment (DeYoung, 2015). As cutting corners comes with the potential risks of getting caught, fired, and demoted, we expect those with high levels of emotional stability or limited neuroticism to report little corner-cutting at work (H2a) which should be further supressed when risk of punishment (H2b) and concerns about the quality of one's work are made salient (H2c).

For years, research on the role of personality traits in organizational contexts has been dominated by the Big Five (see Jonason, Wee, & Li, 2014a). Only recently has attention been drawn to the utility of examining darker aspects of human nature to understand aspects of organizational psychology such as vocational interests (Jonason et al., 2014c), workplace manipulation (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012), and satisfaction (Jonason, Wee, & Li, 2015) as they relate to the Dark Triad traits (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). The Dark Triad traits are characterized by vanity and self-centeredness (i.e. narcissism), manipulation and cynicism (i.e. Machiavellianism), callous social attitudes and impulsivity (i.e. psychopathy). There are good theoretical and empirical reasons to expect that these traits should be associated with attitudes that would facilitate cutting corners at work. First, the traits are associated with impulsivity (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), risk-taking and future discounting (Jonason, Koenig, & Tost, 2010), limited self-control, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity symptoms (Jonason et al., 2010), deception and lying (Jonason et al., 2014b), and have a characteristically short-term mating style (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009). As cutting corners may impose costs on others (i.e., externalities), the limited empathy characterized by these traits (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013) may be fundamental in facilitating cutting corners. Second, these traits may represent adaptations geared towards prioritizing immediate outcomes over delayed rewards as predicted by Life History Theory (Figueredo, Vásquez, Brumbach, Schneider, Sefcek, Tal, & Jacobs, 2006; Wilson, 1975). Cutting corners may be a manifestation of the tradeoffs individuals face between doing work well that may take more time and doing it fast and perhaps less well and with more potential risk. If correct, those characterized by these traits (especially psychopathy) should report more corner-cutting (H3a) and given the considerable correlation between the Dark Triad traits (especially psychopathy) and the Honesty/Humility factor of the HEXACO model (Jonason & McCain, 2012), we expect low rates of honesty and humility to be associated with more corner-cutting (H3b). Low scores on this dimension have been associated with a range of maladaptive and antisocial behaviors in the workplace such as unethical business practices (Lee, Ashton, Morrison, Cordery, & Dunlop, 2008).

Thus far, we have focused on the broadband personality traits, but as mentioned above we were also interested in one narrowband personality trait as well. Narrowband traits are highly specific and act as proximal predictors of attitudes and behaviors. In this case, we adopt a measure that has its origins in the organizational psychology literature: proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993). This construct taps individual differences in people's tendencies to take advantage of opportunities for advancement at work and planning for the future of one's career. People characterized by a proactive personality have objective (i.e., supervisor-rated) and subjective career success, career self-efficacy, and are characterized by extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (Fuller & Marler, 2009). All estimates suggest these people are "ideal" employees. As cutting corners may have consequences that will inhibit getting ahead at work, we expect individuals high on this trait to shy away from cutting corners when presented with that opportunity (H4). As such, tests with this trait serve to assess the discriminant validity of corner-cutting, as we expect it to be less about advancement and more about getting the job done as quickly as possible.

We also expect sex differences in cutting corners. If we are correct that cutting corners reflects the tendency to prioritize immediate needs at work and engage in risky behavior, then men should be more likely to cut corners than women are (H5a). However, on its own, the bivariate association between sex and cutting corners is not informative because it begs the question of what are the psychological mechanisms that differ in the sexes that might predict this. Therefore, we further seek to investigate how personality traits might act as mediators accounting for the sex difference in cutting corners (i.e., confounding mediation). In this case, it is not that men are dispositionally predisposed as an entire sex towards cutting corners, but rather that men tend to be more likely than women are to be characterized by personality traits that enable cutting corners at work. In particular, we expect sex differences in the Dark Triad traits (Jonason, Li & Czarna, 2013) to be particularly salient. For instance, sex differences in people's interest in casual sex are mediated by individual differences in the Dark Triad traits (Jonason et al., 2009). In contrast to men, women are more conscientious and neurotic (Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allik, 2008). Therefore, we expect individual differences in the Big Five traits and the Dark Triad traits to act as mediators for sex differences in corner-cutting (H5b).

Thus far we have focussed only on the nomological network surrounding cutting corners and neglected potential outcomes. Previous research has examined the relationship between cutting corners and various outcomes such as safety (Christian et al., 2009; Halbesleben, 2010). Here, we seek to extend this research by examining whether corner-cutting is costly to individuals in terms of their career success (using salary as a proxy; see Heslin, 2005). We, therefore, explore whether the tendency to cut corners is associated with salary. Although this analysis is primarily exploratory, we do not expect a strong relationship in either direction because the impact of cutting corners on career success will likely depend on the *reason* for cutting corners. For example, when individuals cut-corners because they are disorganised and careless (i.e., low in conscientiousness) it is likely to have different consequences than when they cut corners because they have a selfish interest in boosting their own productivity at the potential expense of organizational goals (i.e., high in psychopathy). Therefore, we expect those low in conscientious who cut corners to make less income (H6a) but those high in psychopathy who cut corners to make more income (H6b).

Although no existing research (we know of) has focused on individual differences in the tendency to cut corners at work, a growing body of research is seeking to determine the trait basis of related constructs. For example, *perfectionism* and *workaholism* are work-styles associated with positive and negative outcomes in the workplace (e.g., high engagement, high job strain; Stoeber, Davis, & Townley, 2013) that have been linked to underlying personality traits. Similarly, workplace *maverickism* is a style of work characterized by independent thinking, goal-focus, and high

productivity that has been linked with underlying traits of extraversion, openness and agreeableness (Gardiner & Jackson, 2015). Our focus on cutting corners, therefore, is consistent with the recent research focus on employee *styles of work*, which may have positive or negative outcomes depending on a range of contextual factors.

2. Study 1

Study 1 constitutes an assessment of individual differences in self-reported corner-cutting. In this study, we sought to assess sex differences, the nomological network surrounding people's tendencies to cut corners at work, and income-related career success of cutting corners as a function of personality. In order to measure the tendency to cut corners at work, we developed a simple, ad hoc, self-report measure of individual differences in this construct that may prove useful in future organizational psychology research on this topic.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were a sample of Australian volunteers ($N = 533$; 47% women), aged 18–84 years ($M = 45.03$, $SD = 16.78$), with 87% reporting English as their first language and 77% born in Australia. Participants were recruited using a large panel research company which has access to 223,899 Australians. Fifty-five percent of the sample was employed (23% part-time, 33% full-time) and 42% were not employed at this time. Thirty-one percent of the sample earned less than $30 K/year, 22% earned $30 K–55 K, 15% earned $55 K–80 K, 11% earned $80 K–110 K, 7% earned more than $110 K, and 11% refused to answer (excluded in analyses).[1] Forty-four percent of the sample were married, 38% were single, and 15% were in a relationship. The majority of participants identified themselves as Caucasian (88%), or Asian (8%), with the remainder (4%) identifying as either indigenous Australian, Hispanic, Middle-eastern, or Pacific Islander. The participants were informed of the study's nature and provided their demographic details, completed self-report measures, and were then debriefed. Most of the participants completed the survey within 15 min. Only those participants from unique IP addresses were included for analyses.

3.2. Measures

Participants reported their agreement (1 = *Disagree strongly*; 5 = *Agree strongly*) with 10, author-constructed items designed to measure cutting corners at work (if they were not currently employed they were asked to respond in reference to their last job).[2] Items were subjected to a common factor analysis (i.e., principal axis factoring). Two factors emerged based on two eigenvalues greater than one (i.e., 4.91, 1.17). The second factor was clearly a method factor because it was comprised of only the two reverse-scored items (i.e., item 6 "It is essential to do every task to its fullest at work" and item 10 "I take my time to get things right at work"). When re-running the analysis specifying only a single factor, these two items had poor extracted communalities (0.23, 0.14 respectively) and weak factor loadings (< 0.50). Consequently, both these items were dropped from the scale. The remaining eight items represented a unidimensional measure with high factor loadings and a high Cronbach's α (Table 1).[3] Importantly, this scale was

reasonably normally distributed (*skewness* = 0.01, SE = 0.11; *kurtosis* = −0.31, SE = −0.31) with slightly more than 35% of the sample scoring above the midpoint of the scale. We summed the eight items and labeled it the "short-cuts at work scale".

The Big Five personality dimensions were measured using the 60-item BFI-2 (Soto & John, 2016). The participants were asked the degree to which they agreed (1 = *Disagree strongly*; 5 = *Agree strongly*) with statements designed to measure the Big Five, such as: "Is inventive, finds clever ways to do things" (i.e., openness), "Is dependable, steady" (i.e., conscientiousness), "Has an assertive personality" (i.e., extraversion), "Is respectful, treats others with respect" (i.e., agreeableness), and "Is moody, has up and down mood swings" (i.e., neuroticism). We summed the appropriate item to create indices each with Cronbach's αs ranging from 0.78 to 0.91.

The Dark Triad traits were measured using the 27-item Short Dark Triad scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The participants were asked the degree to which they agreed (1 = *Disagree strongly*; 5 = *Agree strongly*) with statements like: "I'll say anything to get what I want" (i.e., psychopathy), and "I insist on getting the respect I deserve" (i.e., narcissism), and "it's not wise to tell your secrets" (i.e., Machiavellianism). Items were summed to create indices for psychopathy (α = 0.82), narcissism (α = 0.78), and Machiavellianism (α = 0.83).

4. Results and discussion

We found that compared to women, men on average made more money, had higher scores on the shortcuts at work scale (H5a), were more Machiavellian, narcissistic, and psychopathic and less agreeable, neurotic, and open-minded (see Table 2). We also found (see Table 3) that conscientiousness was negatively correlated with short-cuts at work (H1a) and neuroticism (i.e., less emotional stability) was positively correlated with short-cuts at work (H2a), and all three of the Dark

Table 1
Factor loadings (principal axis factoring) of items comprising the scale created to measures individual differences in cutting corners at work.

	Loading
1. When I can, I cut corners at work.	0.82
2. I try to minimize the effort expended when doing work.	0.68
3. If skipping a task will save me time at work, I will do it.	0.83
4. I do not do every little part of my work.	0.72
5. I am more concerned with the finished product than all the little steps.	0.55
6. I am more concerned with getting something done than getting it right at work.	0.64
7. I use short-cuts at work to get ahead.	0.82
8. Efficiency is more important than accuracy at work.	0.65
Eigen	4.54
Percent variance accounted for	56.75
Cronbach's α	0.89

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and sex differences for income, short-cuts ate work, and personality variables.

	M (SD)			t	d
	Overall	Women	Men		
Income	2.31 (1.30)	2.10 (1.27)	2.51 (1.29)	−3.47**	−0.30
Short cuts at work	20.44 (6.33)	19.34 (6.34)	21.41 (6.14)	−3.83**	−0.34
Machiavellianism	26.65 (6.16)	25.83 (6.40)	27.37 (5.83)	−2.92*	−0.25
Narcissism	23.35 (5.67)	22.50 (5.88)	24.14 (5.36)	−3.38**	−0.30
Psychopathy	20.22 (6.58)	18.64 (6.41)	21.61 (6.36)	−5.37**	−0.47
Extraversion	36.64 (7.69)	36.68 (7.62)	36.61 (7.78)	0.10	0.01
Agreeableness	43.10 (7.12)	44.27 (7.25)	42.03 (6.85)	3.69**	0.32
Conscientiousness	42.04 (6.82)	42.63 (6.73)	41.52 (6.87)	1.87	0.16
Neuroticism	34.93 (9.79)	36.58 (10.16)	33.38 (9.20)	3.84**	0.33
Open-mindedness	41.03 (7.06)	41.91 (7.26)	40.24 (6.77)	2.78*	0.24

Note. Income is on a scale of 1–5 in categories of income; *d* is Cohen's *d* for effect size.
* $p < 0.01$.
** $p < 0.001$.

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[1] We measured annual salary using five ordinal categories because pilot research indicated that participants were less likely to respond to an open ended salary question.

[2] Results were generally robust across current employment status and, thus, results reported do not consider that distinction. For example, there were no differences in corner-cutting tendencies ($F = 1.16$).

[3] While it is possible that the concept of cutting corners at work in multidimensional, based on our judgment of the items and our lack of theory to propose such a construct, we feel these items are loading on another factor as per the noted limitations of reversed-scored items (Marsh, Scalas, & Nagengast, 2010).

Table 3
Correlations between income, short-cuts are work, and personality variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Income	–									
2. Short cuts at work	0.08	–								
3. Machiavellianism	0.06	0.39**	–							
4. Narcissism	0.19*	0.26**	0.42**	–						
5. Psychopathy	0.11	0.50**	0.61**	0.55**	–					
6. Extraversion	0.20*	−0.12*	−0.05	0.45**	−0.02	–				
7. Agreeableness	−0.05	−0.40*	−0.41**	−0.22*	−0.60**	0.21*	–			
8. Conscientiousness	0.10	−0.35**	−0.11	−0.10	−0.31**	0.35**	0.40**	–		
9. Neuroticism	0.16*	0.18*	0.20*	−0.10	0.23*	−0.43**	−0.41**	−0.38**	–	
10. Open-mindedness	−0.06	−0.19*	−0.09	0.15*	−0.20*	0.32**	0.25**	0.23*	−0.09	–

* $p < 0.01$.
** $p < 0.001$.

Triad traits were associated with a greater tendency towards cutting corners at work (H3).[4]

Given the shared variance within and between the Dark Triad traits and the Big Five traits we assessed the relative importance of predictors utilising multiple regression (see Table 3). First, we ran a standard multiple regression with the Dark Triad traits as predictors.[5] While the Dark Triad collectively accounted for significant variance in cutting corners ($R^2 = 0.27$, $F(3, 532) = 63.78$, $p < 0.01$), it was driven primarily by psychopathy ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$). Second, we assessed the unique contribution of the Big Five traits in accounting for the cutting corners at work in the same way.[4] The Big Five traits also accounted for significant variance in cutting corners ($R^2 = 0.21$, $F(5, 522) = 26.89$, $p < 0.01$) which was driven primarily by agreeableness ($\beta = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$). And third, given the overlap of the Dark Triad traits with the Big Five, we ran a hierarchical multiple regression with the Big Five traits at Step 1 and the Dark Triad traits at Step 2. The addition of the Dark Triad traits accounted for significant increment in variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.10$, $F(3, 518) = 27.44$, $p < 0.01$), with the scales of conscientiousness ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.01$), Machiavellianism ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$),[6] and psychopathy ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$) emerging as unique predictors of short-cuts at work in the final step of the model.

In order to test our mediation hypothesis (H5b), we conducted a test of indirect effects using PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) in SPSS, and included Conscientiousness, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy as mediators. These specific variables were chosen because they were found to be unique predictors of cutting-corners in the previous analysis. Significance was assessed using bootstrap samples to generate standard errors. Sex indirectly predicted the tendency to cut corners via conscientiousness (*standardized indirect effect* = 0.02, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.16]), Machiavellianism (*standardized indirect effect* = 0.02, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.05]), and psychopathy (*standardized indirect effect* = 0.07, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.11]). Collectively, these variables fully mediated the relationship between sex and corner cutting behavior, because the direct effect was no longer significant when controlling for the proposed mediators (*standardized direct effect* = 0.05, $p = 0.11$, 95% CI [−0.01, 0.13]). This suggests that men tend to cut corners more than women because they are more Machiavellianism and psychopathic and less conscientiousness.

In order to determine whether the relationship between corner-cutting and career success (i.e., salary) depends on associated personality traits (H6a, b) we conducted two moderated regressions (again using PROCESS) with Conscientiousness and Psychopathy as moderators.

Initially, income and cutting corners at work were uncorrelated (albeit slightly positive; $r = 0.05$, $p = 0.23$), suggesting it does not really matter in terms of income whether someone cuts corners. This effect was not found to be conditional on conscientiousness (disconfirm H6a); the interaction term representing the product of Conscientiousness and cutting corners did not uniquely predict income ($B = -0.04$ $p = 0.55$, 95%, CI [−0.19, 0.10]). However, psychopathy was found moderate the relationship between cutting-corners and career success; the interaction of psychopathy × cutting corners was significant ($B = 0.02$, $p < 0.02$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.03]). Cutting corners positively predicts income when people are high in psychopathy, but not when they are low (see Fig. 1).

5. Study 2

Study 1 provided an initial foray into the topic of individual differences in cutting corners at work. However, we (1) exclusively studied Australians, (2) relied on an ad hoc measure of individual differences in cutting corners, (3) did not take into account potential motivational differences in cutting corners, and (4) did not discriminate corner-cutting behavior from proactivity. If proactivity is about taking action, especially in the workplace, to better one's position as opposed to merely rushing to get work done, it should provide discriminant evidence of the uniqueness of cutting corners at work. In Study 2, we used a behavioroid, scenario-based measure of decision-making whereby participants responded to one of three different corner cutting scenarios that differ in terms of likely outcomes of corner-cutting behavior (i.e., saved time, potential for reprimand, reduced quality of work; Beck et al., 2016; Sackett, 2002). We assessed whether individual differences in responses across these three conditions is related to personality traits, workplace specific proactivity, sex differences, age, and employment status.
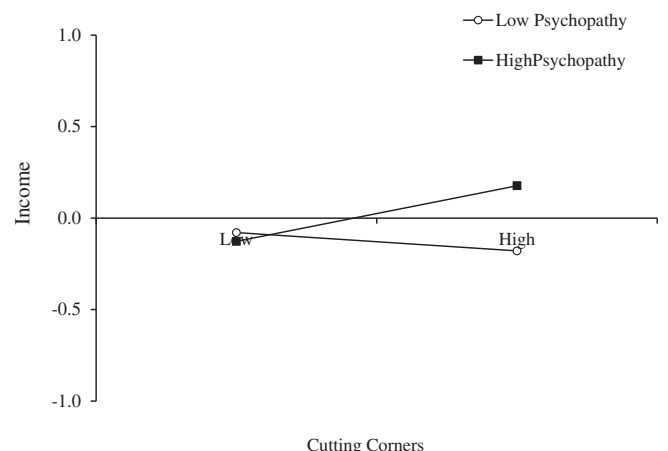

Fig. 1. Psychopathy × cutting corners at work predicting income.

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[4] When we partialed individual differences in participant's age and sex in the correlations between personality traits and short-cut taking, all the results remained significant. Age was uncorrelated with income but was correlated with short-cut taking ($r(533) = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$). Full details available upon request.

[5] Full details available upon request.

[6] The emergence of Machiavellianism here suggests some potential suppression revealed once the variance in the Big Five traits was controlled for. However, given the tenuous nature of suppression and the related difficulty in its interpretation, we avoid any more comment on this effect.

6. Method

6.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were a sample of American Mechanical Turk workers ($N = 589$; 46% women),[7] aged 18–69 years ($M = 34.30$, $SD = 10.37$), who were paid US$0.50 for their completion of one of the three versions of the questionnaire. Sixty-nine percent of the sample was employed full-time, with 22% employed part-time, and 9% unemployed. The participants identified themselves as Caucasian (78%), Asian (7%), African descent (7%), Hispanic (6%), other (4%). The participants were informed of the study's nature and provided their demographic details, completed self-report measures, and were then debriefed. Most of the participants completed the survey within five minutes. Only those participants from unique IP addresses were included for analyses.

6.2. Measures

To measure major personality traits, we used the 60-item HEXACO-PI-R (Ashton & Lee, 2009).[8] It measures six different factors of personality including Honesty/Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness along with four facets of each factor. Participants were asked their agreement (1 = *Disagree strongly*; 5 = *Agree strongly*) with the statements. For instance, as an indicator of the Honesty/Humility factor participants reported agreement with the item: "I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it". The Cronbach's αs for the six dimensions ranged from 0.72 to 0.84.[9]

We measured individual differences in proactivity (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Participants were asked their agreement (1 = *Disagree strongly*; 5 = *Agree strongly*) with statements like "I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life" and "I enjoy facing and overcoming obstacles to my ideas". The items were averaged to create a measure of individual differences in proactivity ($\alpha = 0.91$).

In order to assess the role of important contextual and motivational factors in cutting corners we compared responses across three between-subjects conditions. In all conditions, participants responded to the same set of personality and demographic questions, but responded to one of three randomly assigned variations in a forced-choice question. In all three conditions, participants were told to "Imagine it is a Wednesday and your boss comes to see you. He wants you to start working on a new project. As you look into the details about how to do it, you realize there are two routes you can take". In condition 1, participants were forced to choose between cutting corners in order to save time v. not cutting corners ($n = 195$). In condition 2, participants were forced to choose between cutting corners when there is a risk of being reprimanded v. not cutting corners ($n = 193$). Finally, in condition 3, participants were forced to choose between cutting corners despite the risk of creating a lower quality result v. not cutting corners ($n = 201$).

7. Results and discussion

In general, people were less likely to choose the corner-cutting option compared to the "safe" option overall (25%, $n = 148$, $\chi^2 = 145.75$, $p < 0.01$). This was also the case in the low quality product condition (25%, $n = 50$, $\chi^2 = 50.75$, $p < 0.01$), in the time-saving condition

(34%, $n = 66$, $\chi^2 = 19.08$, $p < 0.01$), and in the potential reprimand condition (16%, $n = 31$, $\chi^2 = 88.92$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that people are generally unlikely to cut corners at work regardless of contextual differences. However, our personality tests provided insight to who this minority might be. As summarized in Table 4, the set of point-biserial correlations between age, personality traits and choice to cut corners indicated that younger, less proactive (H4), less honest (H3b), less extraverted, less conscientious (H1a), and less open people were more likely to cut corners. In addition, neurotic individuals were likely to cut corners when product quality was at risk (H2c) but not in the context of potential punishment (H2b). To assess the relative importance of these predictors, binary logistic regressions were conducted within each condition. Across all conditions, conscientiousness was the strongest predictor of the decision to cut corners, with honesty/humility, neuroticism and openness to experience uniquely predicting the decision to cut corners in at least one condition. Logistic regression was then used to test whether the effects of personality on corner-cutting was moderated by condition. This was done by dummy coding the variable representing "condition" into two (k-1) variables, and forming cross-products by multiplying these dummy variables by each personality trait. The potential moderating effect of context on each personality trait was then assessed by entering the two cross-products for each trait × context interaction at block 2 of a binary logistic regression (controlling for all personality traits and context as step 1). As hypothesised (H1b), the effects of conscientiousness on cutting corners did not vary across condition ($\chi^2(2) = 7.82$, $p = 0.45$).[10] The only association slightly moderated by condition in the prediction of cutting corners was openness ($\chi^2(2) = 5.69$, $p = 0.06$), which was probably caused by the moderate negative relationship between openness and cutting corners in the risk-reprimand condition. No other personality traits were moderated by condition in the prediction of cutting corners. Collectively, therefore, the moderation tests reaffirm the fundamental premise in personality research of cross-situational consistency.

And last, we examined potential sex differences in corner cutting across the three conditions (H5a). Only one sex difference approached significance ($\chi^2 = 2.45$, $p < 0.08$, $\Phi = -0.12$), suggesting that men (20%) were more willing to risk getting a reprimand for cutting corners than women (11%). As such, we did not pursue mediation tests here. In addition to our core tests, part-time employees (39%) were slightly more likely ($\chi^2 = 2.31$, $p < 0.09$, $\Phi = -0.07$) to cut-corners than full-time employees (23%). This weak effect was driven by individual differences in the choice to cut corners just to save time ($\chi^2 = 2.27$, $p < 0.10$, $\Phi = -0.11$) with more part-time employees (42%) than full-time employees (30%) choosing to cut corners.

8. General discussion

Cutting corners or taking short-cuts at work is a relatively new idea in the organizational literature. The vast majority of that work has focused on situational causes (Beck et al., 2016; Hannah & Rovertson, 2015; Sekerka & Zolin, 2007) and organizational and personal costs for cutting corners (Beck et al., 2016; Christian et al., 2009; Halbesleben, 2010; Sackett, 2002). While situational changes and organizational costs matter, the apparent importance of personality traits in understanding various aspects of organizational psychology (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Judge & Bono, 2001) and the potential for positive benefits afforded by cutting corners in particular organizational climates (Ash et al., 2003), encouraged us to create a more comprehensive picture of cutting corners at work. Across two studies we sought to explore the tendency to cut corners at work from the perspective of individual differences in personality traits overall and across different contexts.

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[7] Given our design, our goal was to get 200 participants for each of the three conditions (i.e., 600) described below. After data cleaning, this was what we were able to collect but our tests should still be sufficiently powered.

[8] Although it uses only 10 questions per subscale, it shows an almost identical factor structure to the full HEXACO scale with equivalent psychometric properties (Ashton & Lee, 2007).

[9] We avoided analyses with the lower-order aspects of the HEXACO given the diminished trustworthiness of overly concise instruments. However, such details are available upon request.

[10] This statistic is used to test the reduction in −2 Log Likelihood following the addition of the two crossproducts (second block) to the logistic regression model. A non-significant result indicates the model was not improved by taking into account potential moderation effects.

Table 4

Relationships, Point Biserial (PB) correlations and Exp(B), between personality traits and response to corner-cutting scenarios across the three conditions and overall.

	Motivations						General cutting corners	
	Product quality		Risk reprimand		Saving time			
	PB	Exp(B)	PB	Exp(B)	PB	Exp(B)	PB	Exp(B)
Participant's age	−0.03	1.00	−0.18*	0.97	−0.12	1.01	−0.11*	1.00
Proactivity	−0.15*	0.89	−0.14	1.14	−0.14	1.01	−0.14**	1.03
Honesty/humility	−0.13	1.09	−0.20**	0.54	−0.29**	0.44*	−0.19**	0.57*
Neuroticism	0.15*	1.99*	0.01	1.04	−0.03	0.85	−0.05	1.15
Extraversion	−0.11	1.25	−0.11	1.13	−0.11	1.19	−0.11**	1.13
Agreeableness	−0.05	1.07	−0.06	1.45	−0.06	0.81	−0.07	0.98
Conscientiousness	−0.40**	0.13**	−0.33**	0.27**	−0.45**	0.12**	−0.39**	0.19*
Openness	−0.07	1.24	−0.25**	0.37*	−0.10	1.09	−0.12**	0.98

Negative correlations represent a greater tendency to cut corners.

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.

In so doing, we followed a growing tradition examining work styles like *perfectionism*, *workaholism* (Stoeber et al., 2013), and *maverickism* (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012).

Overall, we found that most people claim not to cut corners at work (Study 1) and do not make hypothetical choices that reflect a willingness to cut corners at work (Study 2). This is likely a good thing because there are serious occupational health and safety consequences for people who do so. As such, our results do not indicate that most people in the workplace are "slacking off", cannot be trusted, and, therefore, need to be micromanaged. Instead, our results suggest that there are some particular kinds of people who are likely to cut corners. Importantly, these people embody various undesirable (in a workplace context) personality features (e.g., psychopathy, limited conscientiousness). This should encourage Human Resources Management professionals to develop practices designed to identify individuals at risk of corner cutting behavior (particularly when hiring), to create policies that make corner-cutting difficult for individuals at risk of engaging in such behavior, and to promote an organizational culture that undercuts the very conditions that encourage corner cutting.

Specifically, we found in Study 1 but not Study 2 that men are more likely to cut corners at work than women. Importantly, Study 1 relied on self-reports of corner-cutting but in Study 2, participants had to make choices where the consequences were salient. This methodological difference might be why we did not find consistent evidence for a sex difference in cutting corners. It might also mean that men are more likely to cut corners in theory or in the abstract, but when the potential consequences are made salient their frontal lobes are sufficiently activated to make good decisions. Indeed, the mediation results in Study 1 confirm such a contention. The men who were more likely to have cut corners at work were those who had personality traits that embodied frontal lobe disinhibition as evidenced in their impulsivity, limited self-control, and ADHD symptoms (Jonason et al., 2010; Jones & Paulhus, 2011) like psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and limited conscientiousness. But lack of self-control might not be the only motivator behind cutting corners. Given the association with dishonesty, it may also be the case that those who cut corners are morally flexible. Indeed, psychopathy is associated with a compromised morality and Machiavellianism is characterized by a moral flexibility (Jonason, Strosser, Kroll, Duineveld, & Baruffi, 2015a).

Thus far we have painted a fairly negative picture of cutting corners at work. However, our results also speak to the kinds of people who are unlikely to do so. Importantly, these are what one might consider ideal employees. Indeed, the proactive employee (Fuller & Marler, 2009) and the conscientious employee seem particularly averse to cutting corners with those low in neuroticism close behind. These employees might be particularly interested in professional advancement, occupational reputation, and work quality that dissuades them from cutting corners, regardless of contextual factors. However, these employees might be inflexible so that they cannot cut corners when the job calls for it. This suggests something of an organization × personality fit warranting future research.

The assumption that corner-cutting is costly to individuals was explored in relation to income as a measure of career success. Overall, income was not associated with corner cutting; however, we tested two potential moderations. We tested whether two personality traits (i.e., conscientiousness, psychopathy) and self-reported corner-cutting interacted to predict income. For conscientiousness, we found no difference between the relationship between corner cutting and income at high v. low conscientiousness. In contrast, we found a positive relationship between corner cutting and income for those high in psychopathy, but no relationship between corner cutting and income for those low in psychopathy. This indicates that cutting corners is only beneficial for those high in psychopathy. One plausible interpretation of this finding is that corner-cutting is used as a strategy by psychopathic individuals who want to put in minimal effort yet still meet deadlines and appear to get work done. In other words, corner-cutting might offset the generally negative effects of undesirable traits on performance; but is likely to only do so in the short-term. Indeed we believe this is likely because no "desirable" traits were found to be associated with corner-cutting. We suggest, therefore, that cutting corners is generally used by poor performers to meet minimal standards rather than good performers to excel. Specifically, we speculate that ambitious individuals high in psychopathy are more likely to use corner-cutting behavior as a strategy to be successful, because they are not constrained by the normal deterrents of this behavior (e.g., the belief that one's own success might come at a cost for the organization or co-workers).

While we report sensible, novel evidence about cutting corners at work, we have remained rather proximal in our theoretical approach. Proximal models are concerned with the how things are done and may suffer from the problem of "missing the forest for the trees". That is, there may be deeper, more ultimate functions operating even in the workplace as informed by Life History Theory (Figueredo et al., 2006; Jonason et al., 2010). Consistent with this framework, individuals high in traits that facilitate their ability to exploit immediate opportunities in their environment (e.g., psychopathy), often men, are theoretically more likely to cut-corners as a strategy for success. When doing so they may be prioritizing both their own interests and the "now" as opposed more delayed, mutualistic outcomes. For someone geared towards the "now", getting work done as fast as possible with little regard for potential errors or dangers of getting caught, cutting corners seems like a reasonable workplace option. From this theory, further questions emerge about the origins of undesirable behavior at work beyond merely descriptive work examining situational differences and personality traits. For instance, what caused the emergence of the corresponding traits in men the first place (i.e., developmental questions) and why would these patterns emerge in the first place (i.e.,

evolutionary questions) are both informative questions to consider. In short, we encourage the exploration of the utility of evolutionary models in organizational contexts (Jonason, Wee, & Li, 2014a). If correct, this model would suggest that like other forms of counterproductive work behavior, cutting corners is merely an expression of a tradeoff between immediate and delayed outcomes that individuals make. Indeed, the disposition behind the proactive personality measure might reflect future planning which is characteristic of those who prioritize tomorrow over today, thus, the results we found.

9. Limitations and conclusions

Despite the novelty of our study, it has a few limitations. First, one might criticize our reliance on WEIRD (i.e., Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) samples. That being said, the samples were much older than most college-student samples and, thus, we have not relied on "standard" samples. Second, we relied on self-report data. While problematic in theory, we feel the online method will have reduced self-report biases. To offset concerns, we varied the personality measures and used different measures of individual differences in cutting corners in each study. We feel that operationalizing cutting corners with behavioral measures will be particularly challenging as cutting corners can take many forms that the researchers may be unaware of and, thus, cannot create in the workplace. Indeed, having potential participants complete a task in a lab and assess some behaviors of cutting corners may be seriously subject to demand characteristics and limited in ecological validity. Third, we do not have any real sense of the damage cutting corners may or may not create in the workplace. This is somewhat beside the point as we were interested in individual differences in people's tendencies to cut corners at work and our methods should adequately tap people's tendencies to do so.

In conclusion, we have provided new information to balance the situationist work on cutting corners or taking short-cuts at work that tends to focus on the undesirable outcomes associated with doing so (Christian et al., 2009; Sackett, 2002). In so doing, we have documented an alternative set of causal forces as to why people may take the potential risks with their jobs, the success of the organization, and even the safety of their co-workers for granted. In short, while most people do not seem to cut corners at work, those who do appear to be characterized by compromised/flexible morality, limited future planning, and selfishness. We would suggest that these tendencies are characteristic of someone who lives a *fast* life in the Life History framework (Jonason et al., 2010) and encourage future work in evolutionary organizational psychology.

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